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Caught In Between. Women of the Demimonde in Higuchi Ichiyō's Narratives

The world of the demimonde with the associations of secret pleasures, aesthetically joyful images and mysterious rituals has long been the object of interest for painters, sculptors and writers in Japan. The history of such an interest would be beyond the scope of my (and, perhaps, any) article; hence my attempt to close-read two of the literary texts set in the pleasure quarters in order to analyse the role and the representation of women there. In my paper I will focus on "Takekurabe" たけくらべ (Comparing of Heights, 1895-1896) and "Nigorie" にごりえ (Muddy Bay, 1895) by Higuchi Ichiyō 樋口一葉 (1872-1896), a prominent woman writer of the early Meiji era.[1]

The choice of the texts is far from random, since they both use the *baishunfu no sekai* (the world of the prostitutes) as a setting for the stories. Moreover, they also explore the psychology of the protagonists and their social role in the context of the pleasure quarters. Interestingly, the stories which are said to have been rooted in Ichiyō's personal experience,[2] were written almost simultaneously and they juxtapose the licensed district of Yoshiwara ("Takekurabe") and the unlicensed tea-house of Kikunoi 菊の井 („Nigorie"). Ichiyō, the writer witnessing the transition from the old to the new Japan, was – I believe – especially apt at depicting the heroines caught in between the everyday world and that of *baishun* (prostitution).

[1] Higuchi Ichiyo's works (Higuchi 1974, 1974a) will hereafter be referred to by their titles, "Nigorie" and "Takekurabe," respectively.

[2] The influence of Higuchi Ichiyō's living in Ryūsenji (in the immediate vicinity of Yoshiwara) on the themes and techniques used in her later stories is highlighted by many scholars. Among others, Ueshima Kintarō and Araki Yoshitane elaborate on the highly plausible influence. Cf. Ueshima 1969: 1-3; Araki 1960: 9-41. The fragments from Ichiyō's diaries related to the genesis of "Takekurabe" are quoted in *Takekurabe kenkyū*. Cf. Aoki 1972: 4-5. The scholars from the United States and Europe also write about the possible influence. Cf. Danly 1981: 75-130. Here is how Bettina Liebowitz Knapp summarizes the relationship between Ichiyō's stories and her experiences in Ryūsenji: "Also influential in her change of literary style was the fact that she and her family had opened a small store in the Yoshiwara (Floating World.). Exposed for the first time to the realities of the lives of courtesans, geishas, and actors, Ichiyo listened to their stories and their cant, closely, passionately, and empathetically. Hadn't she herself known the depths of despair? (…) Now, for the first time, Ichiyo, identifying with the downtrodden, would be writing from her own guts. No longer was it a question of setting down intellectual frames of reference or structuring artificial sequences of events. What she would now write would be real*."* Knapp 1992: 162.

The Demimonde and Its Impact on the Literary Imagination in Early Modern Japan

Although the history of the ladies of pleasure in Japan cannot be easily delineated, nonetheless its origins may be traced back to ancient times, i.e. to *yūkō jofu* 遊行女婦 (itinerant women), *ukareme* 浮かれ女 (floating women), or *saburuko* 左夫流子 ("the one who serves")[3]. The literary works created in the Heian period include passages which clearly illustrate that prostitution flourished at the time. *Yūjoki* 遊女記 (Prostitute's Account) by Ōe Masafusa 大江匡房 includes depictions of gay quarters by the river Yodogawa and of professional entertainers, *shōjo* or *utame* 倡女.[4] Gradually, various strata of courtesans were developed and, with a rapid increase in their number, the post of *keisei bettō* 傾城別当 (administrator to the courtesans) was created in the dawn of the Kamakura period.[5] Furthermore, the establishment of a bureau of prostitution (*keisei kyoku* 傾城局) during Ashinaga Yoshiharu's government became one of the landmarks in the process of institutionalisation of prostitution in Japan, another one being Toyotomi Hideyoshi's consent to opening a walled-in pleasure area in Kyoto, which was later relocated and as such gave rise to the famous Shimabara quarter.[6] Three decades later, and quite naturally, a vibrant red-light district was created in Edo, a city animated by samurai, merchants and travellers.[7] From that moment on Yoshiwara – since this was the name of the district – was transformed into a symbol of the demimonde with its lures, pleasures, and rituals.

The wall and the moat which divided the pleasure quarter from the outside world with time also gained a symbolic meaning. They were not only physical objects but became a sign of division between the everyday life and the realm of sensuous gestures and arcane rituals. It is not surprising then that the place became a frequent theme in many stories written in the Edo period. The critique of the courtesans (*yūjo hyōbanki* 遊女評判記)

[3] Cf. Segawa 1993: 3.

[4] Masafusa 1979: 153-155. The world of professional prostitutes is also evoked in: Ōno Masafusa's 大江匡房 *Karaishiki* 傀儡子記, Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, *Sarashina nikki* 更級日記. The genre of *shirabyōshi* 白拍子 writings that developed from late Heian times into the Kamakura period and focused on female entertainers in male clothing. Cf. Segawa 1993: 4-5.

[5] Cf. Fiévé, Waley 2003: 97.

[6] In 1589 Hara Saburōzaemon asked Hideyoshi for permission to open a brothel. As a consequence, the first walled-in quarter was erected in the area of Nijō Yanagimachi (or Reizei Madenokōji) in Kyōto. The pleasure quarter of Kyōto was later moved to the western suburb of Suzakuno in 1640-1641; it came to be known as the Shimabara. Cf. Segawa 1993: 8.

[7] Cf. Segawa 1993: ix.

was among the most popular literary genres of the time.[8] It also might have inspired Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴（1642 – 1693）, who started his career as a fiction writer with the publication of *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* 好色一代男 (A Life of an Amorous Man) in 1682. In this book, Saikaku drew upon the image of the famous district with the abundance of its erotic and aesthetic associations. In fact, he did not visit Yoshiwara himself and knew it only from rumours and gossip; nonetheless, he was able to present a vivid picture of the hustle and bustle of the place.[9] Interestingly, Saikaku was also successful in evoking Yoshiwara metonymically, by means of referring to its most famous and high-ranked (*tayū* 太夫) courtesans[10]. If Saikaku's works emphasise the vividness and sensuousness of Yoshiwara, the plays written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門 (1653-1725), on the other hand, focused on its social role. Yoshiwara, a place sought after as a shelter in the world governed by social obligations (*giri*) and arranged by hierarchy, became in Chikamatsu's works a domain of true passion (*ninjō*) and a centre of dramatic conflict.

Higuchi Ichiyō's Approach to the Literary Tradition

As has been mentioned, the literary tradition of pleasure quarters and of courtesans had already been established in early Meiji Japan when Higuchi Ichiyō started writing two of her stories centred on the idea of prostitution. She could not but find her own way to refer not only to Ihara Saikaku's and Chikamatsu Monzaemon's achievements but also to the canonical works of old Japanese literature of *Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語, *Izumi Shikibu Nikki* 和泉式部日記, *Ise Monogatari* 伊勢物語 which rendered the themes of budding love, admiration, longing and disillusionment, all of which are present in the works of Ichiyō.

Her use of literary motifs and allusions is, however, very innovative and multilayered[11]. Whenever she applies Saikaku's narrative technique in

[8] Cf. Lane 1957: 679-681.

[9] Cf. Noma 1952.

[10] The meeting of Yonosuke 世の助 with the courtesans of Yoshiwara is vividly depicted in Saikaku's *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* 好色一代男. The enumeration of the courtesans' names used to evoke the atmosphere of the pleasure quarters is also present in his *Kōshoku gonin onna* 好色五人女.

[11] References to popular songs, love songs are also abundant in Higuchi Ichiyō's stories. The quotations below come from Robert Danly's translation included in his famous study of Ichiyō. Cf. "Secret Love" sung by Shōta when he is waiting for Midori (Danly 1981: 270); "How sad it is for one to wait alone by the midnight hearth." (271); "Come to see the thriving quarter/The lights, the lanterns under every eave/The gaiety of all five streets" (271); Geisha's singing, "today we shall spend our night of love" (276-7); "Growing up,/She plays among the butterflies/And flowers./But

setting the scene of introducing the heroines – she is always eager to transcend it by examining the possible psychological motives of the protagonists.[12] Even if she uses the quotation from *Ise Monogatari* as a title for her story, she is still able to explore the complexities of the childhood intimacy motif (*osananajimi* 幼馴染) and to write in depth about the unavoidable disillusionment.[13] She may refer to the ideals of courtship in *Genji Monogatari* but simultaneously she attempts to illustrate the incompatibility of the old ideals to the world of courtesans.[14]
Ichiyō's approach to the traditional concept of *shusse* (social promotion), *shinjū* (love suicide) or *kaimami* (peeping from behind a fence), which were frequently interwoven in the *kuruwa mono* (stories about the red-light quarters) is also highly creative. The concept of *shusse* or social promotion is altered, i.e. modernized to suit the Meiji ideas of social advancement via education.[15] The traditional theme of lovers' suicide (or double suicide), of which „Nigorie" is reminiscent, is used in a more ambiguous manner to argue that the act which was commonly considered heroic is also harmful and egocentric.[16] The scene in "Takekurabe" where Midori 美登利

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she turns sixteen,/And all she knows/ Is work and sorrow." (283); "My love is like a bridge of logs across the Hosotani River (…) I'm afraid to cross to the other side; I'm afraid to stay where I am" (232).

[12] Timothy J. van Compernolle speaks of the "intense psychological focus" and juxtaposes it with the interest of *kibyōshi* 黄表紙, *ninjōbon* 人情本 and didactic tales in Ichiyō's story. Cf. van Compernolle 2006: 98. Aoki Kazuo claims that Ichiyō manages to grasp the complexities/intricacies of the children's (and human, in general) psychology. He gives the example of Chōkichi who is not depicted stereotypically but rather as a complex character motivated by a sense of inferiority, admiration and oppression in the contact with Shōta who is endowed with learning skills. Cf. Aoki 1972: 16. The psychological dimension present in "Takekurabe" is also emphasized by Tanaka 1956 -1957: 187.

[13] The neologism "takekurabe" which is inspired by the poems exchanged by young lovers in chapter 23 of *Ise monogatari*. The word also appears in Ichiyō's "Wakarejimo" 別れ霜 (Frost at Parting, 1982). As a consequence, the title of "Takekurabe" is referring not only to the famous *monogatari* but also to Ichiyō's previous work and its connotations are more complex. Cf.: Aoki 1972: 7.

[14] "Yesterday she adopted a name of some Murasaki from *The Tale of Genji* at a shop by the river, and today she went away with some tramp." (昨日河岸店に何紫の源氏名耳に殘れど、けふは地廻りの吉と手馴れぬ.) "Takekurabe": 403. If not mentioned otherwise, all the translations are made by Katarzyna Sonnenberg.

[15] This concept is broadly discussed by van Compernolle in relation to another of Higuchi Ichiyō's stories, i.e. "Jūsan'ya" 十三夜 (The Thirteenth Night, 1895). Cf. van Compernolle 2004: 353-381.

[16] Cf. Danly: 141. Shinjū as presented in "Nigorie" is interpreted as an egoistic decision in van Compernolle 2006: 80. The character of Oriki and Genshishi's relationship is unclear. Equally ambiguous is their death, rendered from the point of view of the passers-by. Some claim it was a lovers' suicide, while others suggest that Oriki was forced to die: "She was cut across the back, through the shoulder. There were scrapes all over her cheek and a stab on her neck. And many more! Undoubtedly, she was trying to flee, and that's when he killed her." (切られたは後袈裟、

observes Shinnyo 信如 whose sandal has been broken, may be considered a *kaimami* scene and is frequently juxtaposed by the critics with the famous scene from "Waka murasaki" (Young Murasaki), the fifth chapter of *Genji monogatari* (The Tale of Genji), in which the male protagonist watches secretly from behind a fence his future lover, Murasaki[17]. In the case of "Takekurabe," however, it is a woman not a man who catches the passionate glimpse. Moreover, the female protagonist is too young to understand the character of her overwhelming passion.

The Demimonde as Reflected in Higuchi Ichiyō's Works

Before I focus on the protagonists of Ichiyō's two famous short-stories, i.e. on Midori ("Takekurabe") and Oriki お力 ("Nigorie"), I would like to define the distinctive features of the pleasure district and the tea-house as presented by Ichiyō. By comparing the depiction of Yoshiwara with that of Kikunoi I will also try to highlight the differences and similarities between them.

Although the name of Yoshiwara never appears in "Takekurabe," the moat dividing the quarter and the Daionji-mae 大音寺前 area is mentioned in the opening passage and the reader is constantly aware of Yoshiwara's looming presence[18]. The reflection in the moat is used figuratively (not

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頬先のかすり疵、頸筋の突疵など色々あれども、たしかに逃げる處を遣られたに相違ない.) "Nigorie": 32.

[17] *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji), Chapter 5: *Wakamurasaki* 若紫 (Young Murasaki), 20, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1963: 197 nn. Comp. "When Midori saw who it was, her face reddened. Her heart began to thump as if there was something important awaiting her. She turned to see if anybody observed her. Then, fearfully, she approached the gate. Shinnyo looked around, too. He could not say a word, cold sweat running down his sides. He felt like running away barefoot." (それと見るより美登利の顔は赤う成りて、何のやうの大事にでも逢ひしやうに、胸の動悸の早くうつを、人の見るかと背後の見られて、恐る／＼門の侍へ寄れば、信如もふつと振返りて、此れも無言に脇を流るゝ冷汗、跣足になりて逃げ出したき思ひなり.) "Takekurabe." 435-436. Here is how Timothy Van Compernolle interprets it in the traditional context: "In this passage, the narrator fuses with Midori, and her discourse becomes inextricably intertwined with that of her speechless heroine as she puts Midori's unverbalized anger into actual words. Nonetheless, there is a prominent gap here between Midori and the person who would speak for her, a rhetorical gap between a silent, brooding Midori and a narrator who fills that void with her own discourse, all the while shifting out of classical Japanese to mimic her heroine's tone and idiom." Cf. van Compernolle 2006: 176.

[18] "It is a long way round to the front of the quarter, where the trailing branches of the willow tree bid farewell to the night-time revellers and the bawdyhouse lights flicker in the moat, dark as the dye that blackens the smiles of the Yoshiwara beauties. From the third-floor rooms of the lofty houses the all but palpable music and laughter spill down into the side street. Who knows how these great establishments prosper? The rickshaws pull up night and day." (廻れば大門の見返り柳いと長けれど、お歯ぐろ溝に燈火うつる三階の騒ぎも手に取る如く、明けくれなしの車の行來にはかり知られぬ全盛をうらなひて…) "Takekurabe," 402, transl. Robert L. Danly,

realistically) as a thread leading directly from the moat to Yoshiwara and then to the characters.[19] Undoubtedly, Yoshiwara is a very peculiar place whose fashions and customs are bound to influence the surroundings. Segawa Seigle thus explains its influential role:

> Isolated in a small walled-in world, assured of government protection and special privileges, the Yoshiwara developed a strong sense of pride in its identity. It nurtured its own unique customs, traditions, language, fashion -- exotic even to Edo, which was itself quite different from the rest of Japan. Edoites were aware of the insular character of the Yoshiwara quarter, calling it "*arinsu-koku"* (country of the *arinsu* language). Arinsu was a corruption of arimasu ("there is"), a distinctive sentence-ending in the special dialect of Yoshiwara courtesans.[20]

Indeed, the uniqueness of Yoshiwara triggered the sense of pride in its inhabitants. It is not surprising then that the narrator of "Takekurabe" creates from the very beginning a synesthetic image of the district in order to emphasize its irresistible prestige. The fashionable Yoshiwara is juxtaposed with the countryside, this juxtaposition being embodied in Midori herself who originally came from the country and therefore was an object of fun and contempt in Daionji-mae:

> At first, Midori had been mortified when girls from the town made fun of her, calling her a country goose for putting a mauve collar upon her lined kimono. She had cried for three days and nights. But now, she couldn't find a match when it came to mocking others and speaking ill of their boorish looks.[21]

The only way in which the approval may be gained in Yoshiwara is by adapting its peculiar patterns of behaviour. She has to learn how to dress, walks, nod and speak in a Yoshiwara fashion.
Understandably, a tea house of Kikunoi could never be compared to the prestige of Yoshiwara. If Yoshiwara has the power to magnetize people

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ibid.: 254.
[19] Cf. Aoki 1972: 13.
[20] Cf. Segawa 1993: 9.
[21] はじめ藤色絞りの半襟を袷にかけて着て歩るきしに、田舎者いなか者と町内の娘どもに笑はれしを口惜しがりて、三日三夜泣きつゞけし事も有しが、今は我れより人々を嘲りて、野暮な姿と打つけの悪まれ口を、言ひ返すものも無く成りぬ. "Takekurabe," 409.

merely by the sound of its name, Kikunoi may be popular among men but it is mostly due to Oriki's charms and not to its cultural or aesthetic qualities. The place has a specific atmosphere imposed by Kikunoi uniforms and informal, flirtatious manners of the barmaids but it is not the symbol of fashion.[22]

There is, however, a trait shared by the two places, i.e. the use of deception in appealing to the clients and in creating the illusion of a better world. The narrator is very careful, it is worth noticing, in deconstructing the deceptive appearances. The opening passage in "Takekurabe" depicts the area of Daionji-mae, adjacent to Yoshiwara, and it focuses on the misleading name of the place: "in front of Daion Temple."[23] Although the name could be easily associated with devotion and quiet prayers, the reality of the place could not prove more opposite. Indeed, hardly will a reader find a more lively and secular place.

The description of Kikunoi in „Nigorie" also focuses on the discrepancy between the appearance and the factual role of the place. It is worthwhile quoting the descriptive passage here:

> The house (of Kikunoi) was a two-story building with a frontage twelve-foot wide. A sacred lantern hung beneath the eaves, and a bit of salt was to summon prosperity. Bottles of famous liquor, empty or not, were places on the shelves in the place resembling a reception corner. (…) The sign at the front door informed precisely that dinner was served but if anyone decided to order a decent meal, what would be the answer? They could not say that that day they had suddenly sold out of everything. Neither could they answer that they only served men. Fortunately, people in this world knew the meaning of their business and no one was coarse enough to come and order a side dish and a roast fish.[24]

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[22] The fact of belonging to Kikunoya was marked by the garments and the way in which she was wearing them: "Her summer kimono was of an eye-catching pattern. She wore a black satin sash lined with material somewhat imitating satin and stitched with scarlet thread. The area around her neck was visible, which was, of course, the common manner of the girls from the neighbourhood." (大形の裕衣に引かけ帯は黒繻子と何やらのまがひ物、緋の平ぐけが背の處に見えて言はずと知れし此あたりの姉さま風なり.) „Nigorie," 4.

[23] Cf. "Takekurabe," 402.

[24] 店は二間間口の二階作り、軒には御神燈さげて盛り鹽景氣よく、空壜か何か知らず、銘酒あまた棚の上にならべて帳場めきたる處も見ゆ、（…）表にかゝげし看板を見れば子細らしく御料理とぞしたゝめける、さりとて仕出し頼みに行たらば何とかいふらん、俄に今日品切れもをかしかるべく、女ならぬお客様は手前店へお出かけを願ひますとも言ふにかたからん、世は御方便や商賣がらを心得て口取り焼肴とあつらへに來る田舎ものもあらざりき. „Nigorie," 5.

Not only is the deception consciously created by the owner of Kikunoi but it is also commonly and unconditionally accepted by the men attending the place. Timothy Van Compernolle even speaks of the combined, simultaneous act of hiding and advertising[25] Moreover, the illusory quality of Kikunoi is mirrored by the shrewdness of its barmaids in deceiving the clients. Oriki on more than one occasion states that her vows are untruthful and her interest spurious.[26] The awareness of being an actress is furthermore associated with the articulated need to be constantly watchful[27].

Another common feature of Yoshiwara (or Daionji-mae) and Kikunoi is the relationship between the red-light district and money. It is implicit in "Takekurabe" and rather explicit in "Nigorie".

The narrator of "Takekurabe" interestingly observes that there is a strong bond between Daionji-mae and Yoshiwara which is based on economic dependency. Most of the people in Daionji-mae have some connection with the quarter, as it is stated early in the story. The narrator even provides a list of possible services that the inhabitants of Daionji-mae pay to the pleasure quarter: girls become maids, servants or escorts and men, too, perform various menial jobs.[28] Obviously, Daionji-mae could not exist without Yoshiwara, but the dependency although not altogether equal is, nonetheless, mutual.

The sketch of the economic relationship between Daionji-mae and Yoshiwara is followed by a number of implicit references to the money gained by Midori's sister who is a courtesan and the main provider for the whole family. Being a sister of a Ōmaki, whose popularity brings to her many a prominent client, Midori can afford toys and candies not only for herself but also for other children. She encourages them to articulate their wishes. "Let's choose what most of us like. I'll pay for everything," she declares a day before the Senzoku Temple festival.[29] Of course, it should

[25] Cf. van Compernolle 2006: 81.

[26] "Yes, I do have various patrons. Exchanging letters with them is not too different from exchanging waste paper. Be it your wish, I will write a love pledge or a vow accordingly." (馴染はざら一面、手紙のやりとりは反古の取かへツこ、書けと仰しやれば起證でも誓紙でもお好み次第さし上ませう.) „Nigorie," 8. The motif of empty promises and deceptive appearances is repeated later in the story. Cf. ibid.: 11-12.

[27] "Be careful, please! Talking like that in front of the house may give people wrong ideas." (氣をつけてお呉れ店先で言はれると人聞きが悪いではないか.) Cf. ibid.: 4.

[28] Cf. "Takekurabe," 402-403.

[29] 大勢の好い事が好いでは無いか、幾金でもいゝ私が出すから. Ibidem.: 409.

not be easily overlooked that Midori's generosity was only possible due to her sister's work as a courtesan.

Finally, the narrator suggests that Midori herself is also regarded as a commodity, in terms of the profit she will bring for the family when she follows in her sister's footsteps. The scene, in which Midori's mother dresses the girl up, may illustrate this attitude: "Midori's mother took to arranging her hair. Being my own child, still, she is a beauty, the woman thought looking at her daughter persistently."[30] Whether consciously or not, the mother inspects her daughter's beauty from every angle as a marketable good.

Oriki, the protagonist of „Nigorie," also embodies the inevitable connection of barmaid's work with money. First of all, she only becomes a barmaid (and a prostitute) because of dire poverty. She was very early orphaned and even with her parents by her side she was frequently hungry[31]. As a barmaid she is able not only to earn her own living but also to help her less popular friends in the Kikunoi quarter. Her generosity results in her friends' gratitude: The girls express "deep gratitude to Oriki," and the narrator bestows her with a title of "their most miraculous goddess of wealth."[32] Of course, Oriki could not be generous were it not for her wealthy clients. Interestingly, the term *najimi kyaku* (or intimate client) used in the story serves to blur the difference between a patron and a lover.[33]

At one point, Oriki overtly explains to one of her clients why she decided to pursue the path of a prostitute:

> I am a human being, too, and some things pierce me to the heart, you know. My parents died when I was a little girl and I have to

[30] 母親が手づからそゝけ髪つくろひて、我が子ながら美くしきを立ちて見、居て見、Ibid.: 412-413.

[31] The poverty of her family is illustrated by the famous passage depicting Oriki dropping the grains of rice into a „nigorie," a muddy bay or muddy waters: "I rushed happily to the door of the rice seller's house, with a bean sieve and some copper coins clenched in my hand. On my way back, however, my hands and feet became numb from cold that permeated my body. And I slipped on an icy sewerage cover, only five or six houses away from the rice seller's. (味噌こし下げて端たのお銭を手に握つて米屋の門までは嬉しく驅けつけたれど、歸りには寒さの身にしみて手も足も悴かみたれば五六軒隔てし溝板の上の氷にすべり…) „Nigorie," 26.

[32] 後には力ちやん大明神様これにも有がたうの御禮山々. Ibid.: 10.

[33] Timothy van Compernolle thus explains the process of blurring the patron-lover distinction: "the competing bond of *koi* 恋, which was an emotion whose ideal expression was produced by literary representation of the transcendental bond between a prostitute and her lover.(…) the material conditions of the prostitution district blur the boundary between love and money." Cf. van Compernolle 2004: 88.

> go on by myself. Oh, there were some men who, regardless of my lowly position, asked me to marry them but I haven't married yet. I was raised in such coarse conditions that I'll probably spend here the rest of my life.[34]

Throughout the narrative Oriki believes that her present situation is determined by her family's poor condition.[35] Furthermore, she tries hard to reconcile herself to the role of a barmaid. Although the client's response is optimistic in suggesting that she could still find happiness in marriage, the dreadful end of Oriki's life proves her pessimism to be well justified and her words to be truly prophetic[36]. Moreover, the dialogue between Oriki and her client is also used to depict the ambiguity of the protagonist's character. [37]

Interestingly, the tone of determinism or the inevitability of fate is also present in "Takekurabe." There are many references to Midori's fate, ironically mirrored by the practices of her sister Ōmaki. Midori's manner of speaking and clothing which imitates her sisters' also foreshadows her destiny.[38] As Van Compernolle claims, "Midori self-consciously copies the

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[34] 私だとて人間でござんすほどに少しは心にしみる事もありまする、親は早くになくなつて今は眞實の手と足ばかり、此樣な者なれど女房に持たうといふて下さるも無いではなけれど未だ良人をば持ませぬ、何うで下品に育ちました身なれば此樣な事して終るのでござんしよ. „Nigorie," 8.

[35] "I have no other choice! I will likewise have to cross the log bridge by myself. My father stumbled over it and fell. They say, it was the same with my grandfather. By all means, I was born into this world with the burden of resentment of many a generation. There are so many things I have to do that I probably wouldn't be able to day before all has been completed." (仕方がない矢張り私も丸木橋をば渡らずばなるまい、父さんも踏かへして落てお仕舞なされ、祖父さんも同じ事であつたといふ、何うで幾代もの恨みを背負て出た私なれば爲る丈の事はしなければ死んでも死なれぬのであらう.) „Nigorie," 21.

[36] "Simply because you were raised in coarse circumstances, it doesn't mean you can't get a husband. Such a beauty as yourself can marry into a distinguished family." (何も下品に育つたからとて良人の持てぬ事はあるまい、殊にお前のやうな別品さむではあり一足とびに玉の輿にも乘れさうなもの.) „Nigorie," 8.

[37] Cf. Danly 1981: 145.

[38] "In Midori's eyes men were hardy fearsome creatures and she thought there was nothing despicable in her sister's profession. She couldn't bear it when Ōmaki was about to leave for the quarter and being able to accompany her was like a dream (…) She had mastered the language of the quarter, and she wasn't at all ashamed to use it." (美登利の眼の中に男といふ者さつても怕からず恐ろしからず、女郎といふ者さのみ賤しき勤めとも思はねば、過ぎし故郷を出立の當時ないて姉をば送りしこと夢のやうに思はれて、（…）廓ことばを町にいふまで去りとは恥かしからず思へるも哀なり.) "Takekurabe," 423. The introduction of the *kuruwa* language to the narrative may indicate a tendency toward reducing the old-Japanese stylization in Higuchi's style. By some critics it is considered a token of modernization. Cf. Vernon 1988: 31.

women of the quarter without understanding the social significance of the modes of fashion and speech she adopts."[39]
Moreover, Chōkichi 長吉 from the backstreet gang insults her not only verbally – by calling her a *jorōme* 女郎め (whore) – but also physically – by throwing a dirty clog at her.[40] The fact that the allusions in the text referring to the girl's future profession are understood by many other characters as well as by the readers but are unintelligible for Midori until almost the end additionally dramatizes her situation.

The Heroines of the Demimonde

The choice of the pleasure quarters as a setting for the stories is not merely made in order to enrich the plot or to attract the readers' attention (as was frequently the case with Saikaku's *kōshoku mono*) but before all it serves to highlight the problematic position of the female protagonists. Let us consider the passages where Midori and Oriki appear first.
The emphasis of Midori's first description is placed on her physicality: on her hair, her complexion and her mouth.[41] It is worthwhile realising that the elements of the description are all strongly imbued with eroticism. Therefore, the moment the girl appears on stage, she instantly becomes an object of men's evaluation[42]:

> When she looked at people her eyes expressed love and respect. She was wearing her orange kimono with flower and bird patterns dyed on it. Her black sash was fashionable and tied high at the waist. On her feet she had clogs soled most thickly. She was coming from the morning bath and on seeing her lovely figure with snow-white neck tucked under a towel, young men going back home from the quarter would exclaim: "I'd like to see her three years from now!."[43]

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[39] van Compernolle 2006: 165.
[40] "You're just a whore, a beggar like your sister," (…) Chōkichi came from behind the others, seized his muddy sandal and threw it at Midori. "This is all you're worth." (何を女郎め頬桁たゝく、姉の跡つぎの乞食め、（…）多人數のうしろより長吉、泥草鞋「草鞋はママ」つかんで投つければ.) "Takekurabe," 414. This scene is considered by critics a foreshadowing of Midori's fate. Cf. van Compernolle 2006: 139-140.
[41] 解かば足にもとゞくべき毛髪を、根あがりに堅くつめて前髪大きく髷おもたげの、赭熊といふ名は恐ろしけれど、此髷を此頃の流行とて良家の令嬢も遊ばさるゝぞかし、色白に鼻筋とほりて、口もとは小さからねど締りたれば醜くからず. "Takekurabe," 408.
[42] The men's opinions are one example of the characteristic 'interspersion' (*tentei* 点綴) of townsfolk gossip. Cf. Seki 1970: 10.
[43] 人を見る目の愛敬あふれて、（…）柿色に蝶鳥を染めたる大形の裕衣きて、黒襦子と

The men's perspective (and their evaluative look may also be interpreted as an elaboration on the famous *kaimami* motif) resembles the young men's evaluation of the beauty of the women returning from the flower-viewing festival.[44]. The emphasis on the physical detail and the symbolic use of garment and hairdo also echoes Saikaku's technique in *Kōshoku gonin onna* 好色五人女. As does the focus on the locale in the story.[45] However, if in Saikaku's stories the protagonist's beauty is idealized and shown as impeccable, Midori in Ichiyō's work is not ideally beautiful.[46]

Moreover, the external detail of Midori's kimono and hairstyle is introduced not only for aesthetic pleasure but also in order to illustrate the process of the girl's growing up.[47] Although the first description of Midori may already suggest her future life as a courtesan, nonetheless, the girl is entirely unaware of the signals she might be sending to others. She does not seem to understand why she should be insulted by others due to the fact that she is to follow Ōmaki's example. On the contrary, she is proud of her sister.

Only towards the end of the narrative, when she is dressed like her sister Ōmaki and her hair is fastened in a *shimada* 島田 style[48], does she realise the inevitable implications of this outfit[49]. From that day on Midori became a different person.[50] This rude awakening is the reason why she despises her new hairstyle: "had it done this morning at my sister's. I hate it" – she says to Shōta.[51] She is, however, met with a lack of understanding on his part. Shōta is still a child unaware of the reality hidden behind the glittering concepts of *kuruwa*. If the external signs are crucial for Midori's

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染分絞りの晝夜帯胸だかに、足にはぬり木履こゝらあたりにも多くは見かけぬ高きをはきて、朝湯の歸りに首筋白々と手拭さげたる立姿を、今三年の後に見たしと廓がへりの若者は申き. "Takekurabe," 408.

[44] Cf. Saikaku 1984: 205-211.

[45] Robert Danly claims that Ichiyō's sense of locale developed as a result of Saikaku's influence. Cf. Danly 1981: 128.

[46] 一つ一つに取たてゝは美人の鑑に遠けれど、物いふ聲の細くしき. "Takekurabe," 408.

[47] The focus on the process of maturing is in accordance with what Karatani Kōjin refers to as the modern notion of childhood. Cf. Karatani 1993: 124.

[48] *Shimada mage* 島田髷 – hair tied up and ornamented with a comb on top; this hairstyle was initially worn by courtesans in Japan. Later it gained popularity among housewives, too. Comp.: Choi 2006.

[49] "Well, this is Midori of the Daikokuya, indeed. With her hair arranged in such a splendorous manner, in Shimada style. Yet, she behaves differently. How beautiful!" (本當に正さん大變だぜ、今日はね、髪を斯ういふ風にこんな嶋田に結つてと、變てこな手つきして、奇麗だね.) "Takekurabe," 440.

[50] 美登利はかの日を始めにして生れかはりし樣の身の振舞. Ibid.: 445.

[51] 姉さんの部屋で今朝結つて貰つたの、私は厭やでしようが無い. Ibid.: 441.

identity so are her relationships with other children (especially with Shinnyo and Shōta). They enable her to discover her position in life and her destiny.

Oriki, the protagonist of „Nigorie," is introduced as a barmaid (*shakufu* 酌婦) in the opening paragraph of the story, which – interestingly enough – is not descriptive but which quotes another barmaid's words addressed to the clients who pass in front of Kikunoi.[52] If the words are left without a response, the positive reaction to Oriki's invitation ("Hello! Mr. Ishikawa! Mr. Maruoka! You have not forgotten where Oriki lives, have you?")[53] is instantaneous: "Immediately, the flapping of footsteps was heard in the corridor. The guests came asking for liquor and the barmaids were offering snacks. The music of samisen spread around and soon the boisterous dances began."[54]

As a consequence, Oriki's first appearance is devised in a form of juxtaposition between her and the rest of the Kikunoi barmaids. This technique illustrates the competitive character of Kikunoi on the one hand, and emphasizes Oriki's superiority on the other[55]. The comparison is further developed to draw attention to Oriki's fine looks. If other barmaids use a thick layer of powder and crimson rouge for their lips,[56] Oriki's beauty is natural and alluring:

> Her hair was washed and tied up in a *shimada* style with fresh rice-straw. Her complexion was naturally white so that even the powder on her neck was unnoticeable. She loosened her kimono almost to her breast as if to manifest their beauty. She was

[52] "Hey! Mr. Kimura! Mister Shin! Step in for a moment! Why can't you come over, when I call for you? I'm sure you're heading to Futaba without even dropping in. You'd better know that I will come for you and drag you out of the place! Now, if you really go to the bath-house, do stop by on your way back. Oh, you liars! I never know if what you're saying is true."おい木村さん、信さん寄つてお出よ、お寄りといつたら寄つても宜いではないか、又素通りで双葉やへ行く氣だらう、押かけて行つて引ずつて來るからさう思ひな、ほんとにお湯なら歸りに屹度よつてお呉れよ、嘘つ吐きだから何を言ふか知れやしない.) „Nigorie," 3.

[53] これ石川さん村岡さんお力の店をお忘れなされたか. Ibid.: 6.

[54] 忽ち廊下にばた／＼といふ足おと、姉さんお銚子と聲をかければ、お肴は何をと答ふ、三味の音景氣よく聞えて亂舞の足音これよりぞ聞え初ぬ. Ibid.: 6.

[55] It is not without a reason that Otaka complains: "I am nothing like Oriki. I have no special skills. It is unfortunate if I let any one of the clients away…" (力ちやんと違つて私しには技倆が無いからね、一人でも逃しては殘念さ.). „Nigorie," 3.

[56] 白粉べつたりとつけて唇は人喰ふ犬の如く、かくては紅も厭やらしき物なり. „Nigorie," 4.

> crouching inelegantly with one knee up and puffed at her long pipe. Fortunately, there was no one to reproach her. [57]

Oriki's natural beauty combined with her personal charm and unusual aptness at conversing with clients contribute to her popularity as a barmaid. Additionally, Timothy Van Compernolle argues, the focus on the physical attributes of the heroine encourages one to interpret her body as a "meeting point of Eros and commerce."[58] The physical beauty of Oriki is later juxtaposed with her suffering and depressive moods:

> It's no use dwelling on it. In front of people, I try to play cheerful. And what happens? No wonder there are people who think I am carefree and reckless! There are even clients who think I've never worried about a thing. Maybe it is my fate. I think there is no one as wretched as I am. [59]

The heroine is aware of the discrepancy between how she is perceived by the visitors and other barmaids and how she feels.
Not only is Oriki juxtaposed with other barmaids but most importantly she is placed and she should be interpreted in relation to her previous patron, Genshichi's family, i.e. his wife and son. Needless to say, Oriki surpasses Ohatsu, Genshichi's wife, in beauty and manners.[60] More importantly, however, it is Ohatsu and her son who make Oriki realise that the consequences of barmaids' undertakings may be deplorable and harmful. [61]

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[57] 洗ひ髪の大嶋田に新わらのさわやかさ、頸もと計の白粉も榮えなく見ゆる天然の色白をこれみよがしに乳のあたりまで胸くつろげて、烟草すぱ／＼長烟管に立膝の無作法さも咎める人のなきこそよけれ. „Nigorie," 4.

[58] Cf. Compernolle 2006: 82. It is nonetheless worth remembering that Oriki's character is psychologically complex: she seems cheerful and carefree but is very depressive and melancholic in her "true" moments.

[59] 考へたとて仕方がない故人前ばかりの大陽氣、菊の井のお力は行ぬけの締りなしだ、苦労といふ事はしるまいと言ふお客様もござります、ほんに因果とでもいふものか私が身位かなしい者はあるまいと思ひます. „Nigorie," 14.

[60] "Genshichi's wife, Ohatsu was twenty eight or nine years old. She was worn out by poverty, which made her look seven years or so older than her age. The dye on her teeth was covered with spots, and her unshaven eyebrows looked dreary. She repaired her Narumi *yukata*, faded already from laundering, by reversing back and front and patching about the knees with almost invisible stitches. She wore a narrow sash put tightly around her waist. She worked at home making sandal covers." (女房はお初といひて二十八か九にもなるべし、貧にやつれたれば七つも年の多く見えて、お歯黒はまだらに生へ次第の眉毛みるかげもなく、洗ひざらしの鳴海の浴衣を前と後を切りかへて膝のあたりは目立ぬやうに小針のつぎ當、狹帶きりゝと締めて蝉表の内職.) Ibid.: 15-16.

[61] "Genshichi, who was a *futon* merchant and a man of certain influence in the town, was a patron

The negative role of the quarter is further strengthened by the dual setting of the story – in Kikunoi quarter and in Genshichi's house. This also emphasises the inevitable tension between the world of barmaids and courtesans and the family life. The former may (and in the case of Genshichi does) lead to the disintegration of the latter.

If juxtaposition may be considered one important technique in presenting the heroines, the symbolic use of images in rendering their psychological states should be regarded as another one. The very title of "Takekurabe" refers to the image of *izutsu* 井筒 (a well casing) which is a metaphor of a boy and a girl – playmates who fall in love with one another. It is said to have been inspired by the poems exchanged in *Ise monogatari*.[62] In Ichiyō's story, however, the image of *izutsu* and the traditional motif of *osanajimi* becomes a metaphor for a modern romantic love.[63] Midori and Shinnyo are meant for two different worlds. Though being children they instinctively sense a barrier between them. Shinnyo, destined to enter a monastery, feels embarrassed in the presence of Midori, who like her sister will become a courtesan. Midori, on her part, wishes to communicate with Shinnyo but her gestures are imbued with meanings of which she is unaware. When she gives him a handkerchief or a scarlet piece of Yūzen silk, she does not know that symbolically represent a courtesan's lot. This symbolism is partly noticeable for other children who, while ridiculing Shinnyo, deter him from responding to Midori's gestures[64]. The only answer he is capable of giving also takes a symbolic form – of a paper narcissus which Midori finds at her doorstep the day before Shinnyo leaves for the seminary.

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of mine for some time. But now he's down-and-out, living like a snail in a hut behind the vegetable shop. He has a wife and a child, too. Really, he is not of an age to be visiting someone like me (…) It's better to send him away without letting us see and maybe hurt each other. I am ready even to live with his hatred. He may even think of me as a devil or a snake." (町内で少しは巾もあつた蒲團やの源七といふ人、久しい馴染でござんしたけれど今は見るかげもなく貧乏して八百屋の裏の小さな家にまい／＼つぶろの様になつて居まする、女房もあり子供もあり、私がやうな者に逢ひに來る歳ではなけれど（…）寄らず障らず歸した方が好いのでござんす、恨まれるは覺悟の前、鬼だとも蛇だとも思ふがようござります.) Ibid.: 13. Junko Saeki claims that Oriki realizes the pain her feelings toward Genshichi might cause his wife and son. Cf. Saeki: 1998: 303-306.

[62] Cf. Aoki 1972: 6-7.

[63] The notion of modern, platonic love might have been inspired by *Bungakukai* 文学界. Cf.: Mulhern, Motoko 1991: 216.

[64] "For a monk's son, he surely knows how to talk to girls. Isn't it sweet how he thanks her with a smile on his face. Is Miss Midori of Daikoku-ya going to become Mr. Fujimoto's wife? The mistress in the temple is also called daikoku!" (藤本は坊主のくせに女と話をして、嬉しさうに禮を言つたは可笑しいでは無いか、大方美登利さんは藤本の女房になるのであらう、お寺の女房なら大黒さまと言ふのだなど.) „Takekurabe," 419.

The symbolic images in „Nigorie" refer to the protagonist's destiny, too. One of the earliest images is that of young Oriki carrying rice back home where her parents are waiting for supper. Tired and frozen, the girl stumbles "on ice on a „Nigorie" cover and falls, dropping the rice she had been holding in her hand." "The rice instantly spilled and went down the gutter through the opening in the sewer. – she explains – The water beneath was filthy. Look as I might I couldn't possibly pick up the rice."[65] She was desperate at that moment but the recurrent image with time gains new meanings. It is used as a symbol of Oriki's lowly condition on the one hand, and as a prophecy of her inevitable failure, on the other. The fragile character of Oriki's existence is further emphasized by the image of the log bridge, an important element in the Japanese tradition of *michiyuki* or "travel sequences."[66] As Van Compernolle aptly realises, the bridge may be both a metaphor of love and a metaphor of success or *shusse* which remains a central problem in the story.[67]

The last symbolic image may be detected in the final scene of the story. The bystanders are watching "two coffins which were carried out of the town: one in a palanquin, the other on men's shoulders"[68] Moreover, the coffins are being carried "after the Festival of Souls had ended."[69] The perspective of the bystanders is used to make the ending of the story more ambiguous. The people are speculating on whether or not the former lovers committed a double suicide. The wounds on Oriki's body might suggest that she did not die voluntarily. The coffin symbolises the transitory character of her life.

Conclusion

"Takekurabe" and "Nigorie," the most widely recognised of Ichiyō's stories, are rarely interpreted from a comparative perspective. If their protagonists are juxtaposed at all, it is on the basis of their differences rather than similarities. Midori is usually placed in the context of child's awakening to the problems of adulthood. Oriki, on the other hand, is much more frequently associated with the problems of marriage and human fate. I believe, however, that by comparing the two protagonists and their position in the world of "pleasure" (the quotation mark resulting from the

[65] 溝板の上の氷にすべり、足溜りなく轉ける機會に手の物を取落して、一枚はづれし溝板のひまよりざら／＼と飜れ入れば、下は行水きたなき溝泥なり、幾度も覗いては見たれど是れをば何として拾はれませう. „Nigorie," 26.

[66] Cf. Nakanishi 1985:120-124.

[67] van Compernolle 2006: 90-91.

[68] 新開の町を出し棺二つあり、一つは駕にて一つはさし擔ぎにて. „Nigorie," 32.

[69] 魂祭り過ぎて幾日. Ibid.: 32.

ambiguous tone of the narratives), it is possible to highlight the complexity of the demimonde as depicted by Higuchi Ichiyō.

"Nigorie," while being rooted in the *shinjūmono* tradition, also questions the moral aspects of the double suicide highlighting its consequences for the family. By showing the impossibility for the heroine to succeed in life, it also incorporates elements of a modern "success story" or rather of an "anti-success story" (*hanshussemono*) so well developed later on by Tayama Katai's *Inaka kyōshi* (田山花袋「田舎教師」), Mori Ōgai's *Maihime* (森鴎外「舞姫」) or Natsume Sōseki' s *Mon* (夏目漱石「門」). [70] "Takekurabe," on the other hand, departs from the Saikakuesque tradition of indulging in the pleasures of demimonde. It rather focuses on the psychological development of a young girl doomed to become a courtesan. My comparative approach proves that Victoria Vernon was right in stating that Higuchi Ichiyō both "challenges the Genroku view of the pleasure quarters and testifies to the survival of some of the societal norms of the Tokugawa past."[71] Since the two texts simultaneously draw upon and transcend the literary tradition of stories set in pleasure quarters, they may be located in-between the world of classical imagery and the dynamic world of modern fiction.

The ambiguous status of the pleasure quarters is further emphasized by the situation of the protagonists. Both Midori and Oriki are in a transitory stage of life. The former is to become a young woman, prematurely deprived of childhood and suddenly aware of dangers that adult life poses. The latter is determined to face the social and moral consequences of her affair and to "cross the bridge" of fate, not only for herself but also for her father and grandfather. In the end, both of them fail. Nonetheless, their desperate striving for love and success later becomes an inspiration for many readers and writers, starting with Izumi Kyōka 泉鏡花（1873–1939）and Kōda Aya 幸田文（1904－ 1990）.

Moreover, Ichiyō's stories also place the demimonde in the context of Meiji society where pre-modern models of family and criteria of social status gradually became subject to changes. The questions of individual freedom, of marriage and divorce are present in the background of the narratives. Ichiyō also exposes economic dependency within the gay quarters and in a family. As a consequence, she continuously questions and broadens the traditional meaning of *kuruwa* and its inhabitants.

[70] Cf. van Compernolle 2006: 90.
[71] Vernon 1988: 30.

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